43 1863.

The Diffusion of Divine Truth.

A

SERMON,

PREACHED BEFORE THE

RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY,

ON LORD'S DAY, MAY 18, 1800.

AND PUBLISHED AT THEIR REQUEST.

BY DAVID BOGUE.

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TO THE PUBLIC.

THE RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY, for whoſe benefit the following Sermon was preached, and at whoſe requeſt it is now publiſhed, was inſtituted in May 1799, by ſeveral Miniſters of the Goſpel, and other friends of vital Chriſtianity. Another Society was ſoon after formed, intitled, "The Society for diſtributing Evangelical Tracts gratis;" but in May 1800, this was incorporated with the above, under a conviction that greater advantages would reſult from their co-operation, than from their ſeparate exertions.

The ſole object of this Society is *the diffuſion of divine truth*, by means of ſmall cheap Tracts on *ſubjects purely religious*, calculated to alarm the profane--to awaken the inattentive—to inſtruct the ignorant—to aſſiſt the plan of education in Sunday Schools, and the benevolent exertions of ſocieties for viſiting the ſick.

The deſign of ſoliciting ſubſcriptions and donations is, to ſupport the expences of printing, publiſhing, &c. at the low prices adopted by the Society, which are continued, notwithſtanding the late extraordinary advance in paper. A liſt of the Tracts already printed will be found at the end of the ſermon, and the following is the outline of the Society's

PLAN.

I. That this Society be denominated the RELIGIOUS TRACT SOCIETY.

II. That a Donation of Ten Guineas conſtitute a Member for life.

III. That every Annual Subſcriber be conſidered a Member.

IV. That the Subſcription ſolicited be employed as a mean of enabling the Society to diſtribute and ſell the Tracts at a cheap rate.

V. That Subſcribers be entitled either to purchaſe any quantity o Tracts at a reduced price; Or, to receive Tracts to the amount of Two-thirds of their Subſcription at the ſame rate.

VI. That a Committee be appointed in London, and a correſponding Committee in different parts of the Country, who ſhall have the care of ſelecting ſuitable Tracts, and of ſuperintending, as their ſituations enable them, the printing and diſtribution.

VII. That a Bookſeller be employed in London as a Depoſitary for the circulation of Tracts.

VIII. That the Committee be empowered to diſtribute Tracts in ſuch channels as may appear to them calculated for uſefulneſs, ſo far as the funds will admit.

IX. That an annual meeting of the Society be held in May, when a Treaſurer, Secretary, and Committee ſhall be choſen.

X. That the Tracts be paid for on delivery.

The following are the Committee for the preſent Year, 1800.

IN LONDON:

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Mr. J. Hoppus.	T. Wilson, Eſq.

J. Reyner, Eſq. Treaſurer, *Duck's Foot Lane, Thames Street, London*; Rev. J. Hughes, A. M. Secretary, *Batterſea, Surrey*; T. Williams, Depoſitary, *No. 10, Stationers' Court, Ludgate Street.*

The Diffusion of Divine Truth.

A

SERMON, &c.

PSALM XLIII. 3.

O SEND OUT THY LIGHT AND THY TRUTH.

YOU often think of heaven. You entertain high ideas of the happineſs of the ſpirits of the juſt made perfect: and your ideas never can exceed the reality. But did it ever occur to you, that there is one privilege, and conſequently one ſource of felicity, which ſaints on earth have over ſaints in heaven, and that is: 'They may be the 'inſtruments of converting ſinners to God?' Peculiar privileges are highly valued: thoſe which we enjoy over our ſuperiors are uſually cheriſhed with ſingular affection. What men on earth poſſeſs above ſaints in heaven, ſhould they not eagerly hold faſt, and with no common zeal improve? Does not the ſingularity of the caſe point out a quarter, to which, with encreaſed ardour, we ſhould direct our efforts? Some privileges we ſhall enjoy through all eternity: but here is one

encloſed within the boundaries of a preſent life. It will be ſnatched from us by the hand of death; and never be reſtored. Does not this conſideration loudly call on us to make the moſt diligent uſe of it while it is continued with us? For a few years we may retain the privilege: and then it is loſt for ever. To have to look back on it with regret, and be compelled to ſay: 'I neglected to 'improve the golden opportunities: and now 'they are gone! never to return,' will be but an improfitable employment in a future ſtate. Let preſent diligence and augmented zeal preclude the neceſſity of ſuch bitter thoughts.

But how ſhall the end be attained? What means ſhall we employ for bringing ſinners unto God? Look to the appointment of Heaven; for there is wiſdom, and God's method is infinitely beſt. He has revealed it to us: it is mentioned in the text. The grand inſtrument is *Divine Truth:* and my aim in this diſcourſe is to recommend the diffuſion of it to the utmoſt of your power.

Deſcend, O ſacred Spirit, into our ſouls, and graciouſly enlighten the mind of the preacher, that he may plead the cauſe of truth with heavenly wiſdom; and open the underſtandings of the hearers, that they may underſtand the Scriptures, and receive the truth in the love of it; and that we may all unite to diffuſe the truth with a zeal proportioned to its excellence, and its glorious effects!

Firſt,

Firſt, *What* is truth? was Pilate's queſtion to my Maſter: but he did not wait for an anſwer. Though infinitely leſs able to deſcribe it, your patient attention I hope to be favoured with, while I make the attempt.

Its *origin* is illuſtrious. Truth boaſts of a better world than this as its native place. There are many ſciences and arts which embelliſh and improve human life; but their deſcent riſes no higher than earth. Divine truth claims heaven as its home: and it claims the higheſt place in heaven. Thoſe are the invention of man; this ſprings from God: it is an emanation of the divine mind. The eternal Son of Jehovah calls himſelf 'the word, the *truth*,' and came to bear witneſs to the truth. What it is, we learn from his lips; and from the inſpiration of the Spirit, who taught holy men of God to record it in indelible characters.

The whole Scripture is truth, and profitable truth; profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for inſtruction in righteouſneſs. In this precious book we are taught the firſt, the great deſideratum, what *God* is, and ſee Him clothed with all the perfections of his infinite nature; and we behold all the glories of his works, his government, and his law. Here too we are taught what *man* is, and we hear Jehovah claiming him as his ſubject, and commanding man to love him with all his heart, and ſoul, and ſtrength, and mind; and his neighbour as himſelf: but we ſee man ignorant, guilty, depraved, and utterly

unable to free himſelf from his wretched ſtate. We are likewiſe taught who and what *Jeſus Chriſt* is, and behold this moſt lovely and benevolent Perſonage, deſcending to earth, appearing in human nature, and giving himſelf a ranſom for ſinners; that by his obedience and ſufferings he might be qualified to be a compleat Mediator between God and man, and execute the offices of prophet, prieſt, and king, in his church. The way is pointed out in which *ſinners* may be *reconciled* to God, namely, through faith in the Saviour's righteouſneſs, and grace, accompanied with true repentance, and followed by a life of holy obedience, ſubmiſſion, and entire devotedneſs to Father, Son, and Holy Ghoſt. The Scripture alſo opens the door of *heaven*, and gives us a delightful proſpect of the joys and glories of that bleſſed place, and of the eternal and everlaſting felicity of the followers of the Lamb: while *hell* is made naked, the covering of deſtruction is taken off, and all impenitent and unholy creatures are ſeen in the agonies of remorſe and deſpair, ſuffering the puniſhment due to their iniquities and their contempt of God. Theſe faint outlines are filled up in the Scripture, which gives us a clear and full view of divine Truth in all the beauty, ſanctity, and dignity of her heavenly original. To the preaching of the Goſpel too, which, from ſabbath to ſabbath, you enjoy, I refer you for a full diſplay of ſacred truth: and, under a perſuaſion, that the remembrance of it is fixed

on

on your memories and on your hearts, I beg you to follow me while I endeavour to ſhew,

Secondly, *How* truth is to be diffuſed. May it be the enquiry of deep humility, and ardent zeal for the honour of God and man's ſalvation!

'I will give you,' ſays Chriſt to his diſciples, 'a mouth and wiſdom, which all your adverſaries 'ſhall not be able to gainſay nor reſiſt.' To every one of us has He given a mouth to ſpeak, may He give us wiſdom alſo: and then ſhall we proclaim the truth; and our tongue ſhall be our glory. *The living voice* has been one grand inſtrument of God for diffuſing truth in the world. He has had his preachers ſince the days of Enoch, who have lifted up their voice like a trumpet to ſhewunto men their tranſgreſſions, and by manifeſtation of the truth, to lead their feet into the way of peace. Patriarchs, prophets, and apoſtles, ſucceeded each other in this glorious work: and the apoſtles appointed paſtors and teachers in the church to continue the good news of mercy and ſalvation to periſhing man. There are, we bleſs God, ten thouſand voices ſtill proclaiming ſalvation through the blood of the Lamb: and their ſound is going forth through the earth, and the words of divine truth to the ends of the world. This mode of diffuſing truth God has moſt eminently bleſſed. He himſelf deigned to employ it at Sinai when the great congregation heard him preach righteouſneſs in the Ten Commandments

ments of the moral law. His only begotten Son alſo condeſcended to be a preacher: and the voice of Jeſus was heard in every quarter of Judea, proclaiming the Goſpel of peace, and crying; 'Come unto me all ye that labour and are 'heavy laden, and I will give you reſt.'

But there is another method of diffuſſing truth, which can plead in its favour divine example and command. Man has a hand to write, as well as a tongue to ſpeak: and God has employed the pen of the ready writer, as well as the tongue of the learned, to convey a word in ſeaſon to him that is weary. The oldeſt book extant is a volume of Divine Truth, which Jehovah dictated, and Moſes wrote. Joſhua, captain of the hoſt of Iſrael, Samuel the judge, David and Solomon the Lord's anointed, the prophets of the Lord, and the apoſtles of Chriſt, all compoſed Religious Tracts for the benefit of mankind. Providence has mercifully preſerved them to be the light, the joy, and the conſolation of every ſucceeding age; and they are now the ſun of the moral world. Where divine truth ſhines with its bright beams from the ark of the covenant, it is day, day as the light of ſeven days. Where theſe tracts are not known, where truth ſhines not, it is night, night like Egyptian darkneſs, with all the horror of the blackneſs of the ſhadow of death. Nay, to do the greater honour to this way of diffuſing divine truth, God himſelf becomes the author of a ſhort Religious Tract: with his own hands he wrote the

Ten

Ten Commandments of the law. You ſee what high authority we can plead for *writing* as well as ſpeaking truth. Surely we need ſay nothing more to ſanction and defend the method we ſo earneſtly wiſh to employ, and recommend to you, our beloved brethren. Will it be ſaid, though the way is plain, what arguments can you adduce to convince the judgment, what motives to influence the will, and engage the affections in the work? Liſten, I beſeech you, while I point out,

Thirdly, *Why* divine truth ſhould be diffuſed.

Its *intrinſic excellence* gives it a claim to as extenſive a diffuſion as its friends can poſſibly procure. Let the things to which it refers, let the ideas it conveys in reſpect to them, and the knowledge with which it illuminates the mind, be attentively conſidered; and we ſhall find one reaſon why divine truth ſhould be diffuſed.

A fair *compariſon* of divine truth with *other ſciences* will ſtill more fully diſplay its worth. Every ſcience is uſeful for certain purpoſes: not one ſhould be deſpiſed. Some are highly beneficial to man as an inhabitant of earth: they embelliſh human life; they encreaſe its comforts. But to inſtitute a compariſon between any one or all of them, and divine truth, is folly. They cannot ſtand the teſt: they are lighter than vanity. As far as the heavens are above the earth, is divine truth above all other ſciences, even the moſt famed; in the purſuit of which literary

literary men ſpend all their days; and from which philoſophers derive all their glory. They are but the play of children compared to the moſt important employment of wiſe and ſerious men.—But not to dwell longer on this.

A more obvious reaſon will be found in the *deſign*, *tendency*, and *effects* of divine truth on the ſtate of the moral world. To ſeparate theſe is not only difficult but unneceſſary: it may be better to blend them; for, the tendency of divine truth diſcovers its deſign, and its effects demonſtrate the tendency.

Divine truth is the grand inſtrument by which God governs the moral world. His dominion is not that of mere power: he rules intelligent creatures in a way ſuited to their nature. By conſiderations preſented to the mind he influences their conduct, regulates it, and reſtrains and overawes them according to his ſovereign pleaſure. The good are habitually under the influence of divine truth, and obedient to its ſway: it preſcribes and forms both their temper and their conduct. Nor are the wicked exempted from its dominion. Though many of them be ignorant of the peculiar doctrines of the Goſpel, there are certain general truths belonging to what we call natural religion, ſuch as the conſciouſneſs of omniſcience, the awe of God's juſtice, and the dread of his diſpleaſure, which ſting their conſciences, and reſtrain them from a thouſand evils which they would otherwiſe commit.

A more

A more ſtriking effect appears in the great things which have been done and ſuffered by the ſervants of God in every age. What wonders of faith does the 11th chapter of the Epiſtle to the Hebrews record! What noble examples of holy obedience to the will of God in the moſt ſelf-denying duties! What patience of reſignation under the moſt cruel ſufferings even unto death, which earth or hell could poſſibly inflict! All the peace in believing, all the conſolation in diſtreſs, all the joy amidſt worldly ſorrow, and all the delightful expectation of hope in the proſpect of diſſolution, all theſe were, by means of *divine truth*, influencing their hearts, and producing the peaceable fruits of righteouſneſs. Whatever great thing has been performed by a believer in Jeſus ſince the day in which God promiſed that the ſeed of the woman ſhall bruiſe the head of the ſerpent, by divine truth has it been done; and a mighty effect it is both as to greatneſs and extent.

Some of the *effects* of truth are ſtill *future*; and may be conſidered under the idea of its deſign and tendency. Were I ſpeaking of human things, and human principles, and of the effects to be expected from them, it would be preſumptuous to conſider them in any other light. Unforeſeen obſtructions might lie in the way of fond expectation, and prevent their efficacy. But when divine truth is the theme, we

can calculate on its power without a peradventure; and when, in addition to its deſign and tendency, God has, in his word, favoured us with promiſes and predictions announcing its extenſive influence on the world, we may ſafely denominate this its certain effect. An effect it is more glorious than any I have yet been able to enumerate; both on account of its extent and its degree.

So *extenſive* will its influence be, that 'the 'earth ſhall be filled with the knowledge of the 'Lord, as the waters cover the ſea:' and 'they 'ſhall no more teach every man his neighbour, 'and every man his brother, ſaying, Know the 'Lord; for they ſhall all know me, from the 'greateſt even to the leaſt.' God's name will be 'great among the heathen, and ſo wide the diffu-'ſion of truth, that from the riſing to the ſetting 'of the ſun, incenſe and a pure offering ſhall be 'preſented to Him.' Wonderful and glorious ſcene! when, as there is but one ſhepherd, there ſhall be only one fold; when the Jews, with the fulneſs of the Gentiles, ſhall rejoice in the light of heavenly truth; and when men ſhall be bleſſed in him, and all nations ſhall call him bleſſed.

But the *degree* of the influence of truth is an event as glorious as its extent. There are two things in the world, which, from its earlieſt days, have been its miſery and its ſhame. God's command

command always was, 'Thou ſhalt love the Lord 'thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy ſoul, 'and with all thy ſtrength, and with all thy mind; 'and thy neighbour as thyſelf.' But *idolatry* and *war* have drowned Jehovah's voice, and marked, as with a ſun-beam, the total depravity of man. Idolatry, ſpreading over every land, (what country has not been defiled with idols?) ſet itſelf up againſt the worſhip and love of God. So depraved, and ſo fond in their attachment to it have men been, that it has even puſhed itſelf into the Chriſtian church; and images of gold, and ſilver, and braſs, and wood, and ſtone, have for ages filled every houſe of prayer; and men calling themſelves Chriſt's diſciples, have been bowing down before them, and doing them homage. *War*, which, ſince Nimrod built Babel, has not ceaſed from the face of the earth, and diſplays with the vivid glare of the flames of hell, hatred rankling in the heart of man, inſtead of love to his neighbour poſſeſſing the ſoul. So thoroughly has this deteſtable principle leavened the diſpoſitions of mankind, that the characters univerſally held up to admiration and eſteem, have been the moſt ſucceſsful in the deſtruction of the human race. When in our boyiſh days we read the poets and hiſtorians of Greece and Rome, with their pagan ſentiments were our tender minds polluted, inſtead of being ſanctified by the pure and benevolent doctrines of the

Apoſtles of Chriſt; and perſons whom we ſhould have regarded with horror, the ſpirit of the world, and the faſcinations of eloquence, taught us to venerate as models of greatneſs and heroiſm. But it is predicted in the ſacred word, that through the influence of divine truth men ſhall caſt their idols to the bats and to the moles, and univerſally turn to Jehovah, and love and worſhip Him; and honour the Son even as they honour the Father. Such too will be the power of truth enjoining the love of man, that wars ſhall ceaſe from the ends of the earth; and men, inſtead of feeling pride in girding on their ſword, and glorying in their glittering accoutrements, ſhall become aſhamed of what they now regard as their decorations, and break the bow, and cut the ſpear aſunder; ſhall burn the chariot in the fire, beat their ſwords into ploughſhares, and their ſpears into pruning-hooks; and nation no more riſe up againſt nation, nor kingdom againſt people; and men ſhall learn war no more. Now the influence of truth is exceedingly *partial:* its votaries are comparatively but few, ſcattered among the multitude; and they have learned it in a very ſuperficial way. Too much ſtill remains of the ſpirit and maxims of the world: and in too many inſtances they reſemble Naaman the Syrian, when he ſaid; 'The Lord 'pardon thy ſervant, that when my maſter goeth 'into the houſe of Rimmon to worſhip there, and

'he

'he leaneth on my hand, and I bow myſelf in 'the houſe of Rimmon; when I bow myſelf in 'the houſe of Rimmon, the Lord pardon thy 'ſervant in this thing.' 2 Kings, v. 18. Then its influence ſhall be general, and it ſhall be more powerfully felt. Then ſhall be a more full diffuſion of ſpiritual light; of holineſs diſplaying itſelf in the exerciſe of every virtue, both in reſpect to God and man; and of true happineſs reſulting from the mightier influence of the ſpirit of the Goſpel on the heart.

The connection between divine truth and eternal happineſs in heaven is ſo cloſe, that it may juſtly be regarded and mentioned as the reſult and effect of its full influence on the ſoul. The ſeed of happineſs is divine truth. When God ſows it in the heart, it ſprings up; it grows; and when brought to maturity at death, the bleſſedneſs of heaven through eternity is the full ripe fruit, the glorious harveſt of divine truth which ſhall never be exhauſted.

There is an additional motive which will have much weight with many, and ſhould have much with all, namely, that thoſe whom God hath called, and *ſtamped with the ſeal of his higheſt approbation* have had it aſſigned them as their employment to diffuſe divine truth among them. This was the office of Enoch and Elijah whom God honoured above all the ſons of men, that they ſhould not ſee death. This was the office of

Noah,

Noah, that preacher of righteouſneſs, who was preſerved alive when all the reſt of the world was deſtroyed by a flood. Moſes the ſervant of the Lord was moſt diſtinguiſhed for this employment in ancient days. His religious tracts in five books have ſhed abroad the light of divine truth through the world from that time to the preſent hour. This was the higheſt honour of David and Solomon. As kings they typified the Meſſiah, and reigned in ſplendour; but the glory of their kingdom ſoon decayed. Their efforts in diffuſing truth remain to this day. David's ſhort devotional tracts eſpecially, have enlightened, ſanctified, and conſoled millions. Have not many of you, my brethren, found benefit from them? What was God's deſign, in ſending his ſervants the prophets? Was it not to ſhed abroad the light of truth in a dark world? This they did by their preaching: this they did by their invaluable writings. At laſt, after theſe ſtars of the night, the Sun of Righteouſneſs himſelf aroſe with healing in his wings, and his wings were the beams of heavenly truth. While we glory in the obedience of Jeſus, and in his ſufferings unto death as the only foundation of our hope; and in his having all power committed to Him both in heaven and in earth, for the deſtruction of his enemies, and the government of his people, it is at the ſame time with delight we hear Him ſay: 'For this cauſe was I born and for this cauſe

'came

'came I unto the world, that I might bear wit-'neſs to the TRUTH.' We reflect alſo with joy that the bleſſings of Chriſt's prieſtly and kingly office are imparted to the ſoul, by means of the truth, which Chriſt as a prophet reveals, and to which He came to give his teſtimony. Is it not a ſingular circumſtance, that when God had but one Son, He ſhould make that Son a teacher of *truth?* and, that it might be more widely diffuſed, He made Him an *itinerant* preacher. Let thoſe who have aught to ſay againſt itinerant preaching, ſay it now. Chriſt's diligence in executing his Father's commiſſion will not eaſily be perceived, unleſs you lay before you the map of Judea, and follow Him in the frequency and extent of his journeyings. Seventy diſciples He ſent forth to call on men to hear the truth from his lips. The twelve apoſtles of the Lamb had the ſame work in this reſpect as their maſter. They were active in it to the end of their days: and, while by preaching they enlightened the men of that age in various lands, by the religious tracts they wrote, they have inſtructed every generation ſince. Judge then how valuable truth muſt be in Jehovah's eyes! In the changes he ſees fit to make in the civil ſtate of the world, from the day that the golden head of Nebuchadnezzar's image was broken off, till the deſtruction of the ten horns of the beaſt, He has in general, hitherto made uſe of them whom he cares not for.

But

But when He would diffuſe truth in the earth, to illuminate a dark world, he commiſſions his choſen favourites for the work: holy men of God are his inſtruments; and his only begotten Son honours the number with his name, and appears among them full of *truth*. Learn hence the mind of God, and be wiſe.

To enlarge here, as I would, your time will not ſuffice. Permit me, however,

Fourthly, To noticeſome general obſervations which are ſuggeſted by the ſubject of diſcourſe; and which tend more fully to promote the object we have in view.

1. It appears to be *one great end of man's exiſtence* to diffuſe divine truth. Is not truth, the grand inſtrument of Heaven, to regenerate the world? Does it not contain words by which man may be ſaved? But the words muſt be ſpoken or written; the truth muſt be made known; and this is the duty and office of all, eſpecially of thoſe who have themſelves received the truth in the love of it. He, in whoſe memory and heart the ſentiments of the ſacred Scripture are engraved, will not need texts to be quoted in confirmation of the aſſertion: the whole ſtream of the word of God preſſes the idea upon him. If a paſſage be aſked for, what think you is the meaning of theſe words: 'Thou ſhalt love thy 'neighbour as thyſelf?' Is not one part of its ſignification, if he be ignorant, inſtruct him; if he

he know not the way of ſalvation, teach him the knowledge of the only true God, and of Jeſus Chriſt whom he hath ſent, whom to know is eternal life? Do we not clearly ſee that the uſual method of the Supreme Being in his government of the world, is to make man the inſtrument of conveying wiſdom, goodneſs, and felicity to man? How has religion been propagated from age to age, but by the zeal of its friends diſſeminating truth all around them, and travelling from country to country, to make it more extenſively known? If we eſtimate duties by their utility, influence, and effects, this will be found to ſtand high in the ſcale. The choiceſt beneſit is hereby communicated to a fellow-creature, the gift of eternal life. The perſon who diffuſes truth, has alſo a great variety of the nobleſt diſpoſitions called forth into exerciſe on the occaſion; love to man, compaſſion for ſouls, high eſtimation of divine truth, a perſuaſion of divine mercy and grace through a Mediator, dependence on divine power for ſucceſs, gratitude to God for honouring him with ſo noble an employment, and affectionate wiſhes and fervent prayers for the ſalvation of his fellow-creatures. Theſe are more valuable bleſſings than the poſſeſſion of a kingdom could beſtow; and by means of them the perſon grows up to a meetneſs for an eternal ſtate. Beſides, by theſe active endeavours to bring ignorant and rebellious

creatures into ſubjection to Him whoſe they are, and whom they ought to ſerve, Jehovah is glorified, and honour redounds to his name. When theſe conſiderations are duly weighed, there does not remain a doubt, but that the diſſemination of divine truth in the world occupies a far higher rank among Chriſtian duties, than one in a thouſand has yet aſſigned it; and that a far larger portion of our thoughts, and time, and talents, ſhould be occupied in its diſcharge.

2. Can it ever be enough lamented, that the diffuſion of truth has been ſo long and ſo much neglected. Scarcely any thing calls for deeper regret. There have been ages when Chriſtians felt all the importance of truth, and ſaw the miſery of man without it, and exerted themſelves with all the fervour of heavenly zeal to make it known. This was the caſe with the apoſtles and evangeliſts, and their immediate ſucceſſors. But afterwards, thoſe who profeſſed themſelves the followers of Jeſus fell aſleep; and the world became dark as the ſhadow of death. At the reformation from Popery, an hoſt of champions for the truth was raiſed up; and the light ſhone through every country in Europe, like the morning ſpread upon the mountains. In ſome, alas! it was ſoon extinguiſhed by the baleful union of force and fraud: it continued in others; but zeal for diffuſing it gradually died away. With the examples of the primitive times, and of the

age of the reformation before their eyes, they languiſhed in indolence. They let their neighbours remain in ignorance without ſeeking to enlighten them: and as for other nations of the earth, how ſeldom was their ſalvation even thought of. Travellers, from curioſity or for gain, viſited heathen lands, and recorded the mournful hiſtory of their ignorance, their ſuperſtition, their vices, and their crimes. Providence deſigned the record as a means of rouſing Chriſtians, and kindling in their breaſts a concern for their periſhing ſouls. But the book of travels was read as a matter of curioſity; and learned men laid it up in their memories: but no one thought or ſaid, 'here is a loud call to Chriſtians 'to make divine truth known to theſe unhappy 'creatures.' What opportunities of doing good have many generations of men loſt for ever! What aggravated guilt has been contracted hereby, and is now lying upon the world! May the attempts we are making in the cauſe of truth be of ſuch a kind, as to ſhow that the weight of the curſe lies not upon us.

3. Have we not reaſon to judge that God is inflicting his righteous judgment upon the nations for not diffuſing, and not receiving divine truth? The moral world is ſo conſtituted, that from the very nature of things, and from the common operation of cauſes and effects, men's vices are like cockatrice eggs, from which are

hatched fiery flying ſerpents, which ſting to death the authors of their exiſtence. Under God's righteous government, wickedneſs renders man the ſcourge of man: and, as in ſome foreign armies, offenders are made to laſh each other, till from encreaſing rage they lay on with redoubled fury, and thus amply inflict the puniſhment decreed; ſo wicked nations are made the executioners of divine vengeance on each other, that all may be puniſhed; while divine juſtice ſits by, and ſees them fulfil its high awards. What is the preſent ſtate of the world, but the dreadful conflict of unhallowed paſſions, generated from careleſſneſs about true religion, the baleful influence of corrupt ſuperſtition, and the brutalizing effects of infidelity. All theſe blown into the fierceſt flame by the wind of ſelfiſhneſs and worldly intereſt, are now raging upon the great ſea, that nation may be the ſcourge of nation, and the quarrel of God's covenant be avenged upon the deſpiſers thereof. He has curſed their bleſſings. 'The Lord hath 'made the earth empty, and made it waſte; and 'hath turned it upſide down, and ſcattered abroad 'the inhabitants thereof; becauſe they have 'tranſgreſſed the laws, changed the ordinances, 'and broken the everlaſting covenant.' Iſaiah xxiv. 1, 5.

The world's wiſe men thought that by deep laid plans of human policy, by a well adjuſted balance

balance of power, and by the lure of commercial intercourſe, they could bind events to their thrones, and keep the kingdoms of the earth in peace. But has it not been 'labour in vain?' 'Where is the wiſe, where is the ſcribe, where is 'the cunning counſellor? Hath not God made 'fooliſh the wiſdom of this world?' And has he not, by his judgments, which have for ſeven years paſt been abroad in the earth, with a ſtrong hand been teaching the inhabitants of the world his righteouſneſs? Had divine truth ruled in the hearts of men of all degrees in Chriſtendom, how widely different would the ſtate of the world have been! While glory was given to God there would be peace on earth and good-will towards men. We have heard of the *cheap defence of nations*. What is there that deſerves the character but divine truth? It is a cheap defence indeed, and an effectual one too; more effectual than powerful armies, and invincible navies. It gives the ſpirit of peace; it enjoins and it produces love; it influences to all that is good; it abhors evil. But it may be ſaid, if one nation was wholly under the influence of divine truth, and enjoyed from it great domeſtic felicity, would not the kingdoms around fall upon it, and deſtroy it? The ſuppoſition has not the face of probability. There can be no ſuch thing as one nation eminently pious, and thoſe around it remaining in wickedneſs. Can a man ſit by a

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large fire, and not feel the heat? Can a nation of Chriſtians exiſt without communicating its ſpirit to every nation around? It cannot. One pious nation would convert the world. How beneficial would ſuch a thing be to men's worldly intereſts! How delightful would the ſtate of ſociety be! It would change earth into a paradiſe. But when we turn from this pleaſing repreſentation, to a view of the world as it is, alas! we behold the wrath of God revealed againſt all the ungodlineſs and unrighteouſneſs of man; and hear the groans of human nature from many and diſtant lands, ſuffering in miſery for its ignorance and its crimes.

4. Thoſe who are employed in the diſſemination of divine truth, muſt not think it ſtrange if they meet with oppoſition. There is in the univerſe a kingdom of darkneſs, of error, and of lies. Satan is its head. He did not abide in the truth, but was a liar from the beginning: he hates the truth, and has ever oppoſed it to the utmoſt of his power. As he rules in the children of diſobedience, and they hate the light becauſe their deeds are evil, they act as Satan's inſtruments in endeavouring to prevent the diffuſion of truth on the ſouls of men. Hence has there been an union both of earth and hell to extinguiſh the light of truth, and ſhroud the world in midnight gloom. When the heralds of divine truth went forth from age to age, they found

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that they were aſſailing ſome hidden powers of darkneſs which were ready to repel the attack, and that they were injuring the intereſts of a kingdom which would not yield, even to God, without the moſt violent ſtruggle. What preacher of truth ever went out into the field without experiencing painful oppoſition in one form or another? Need I bring to your recollection the hiſtory of prophets and apoſtles in order to confirm my aſſertion? Is it neceſſary to refer you to the life and death of Jeſus Chriſt, the very truth itſelf? The records of his church preſent the ſame unvaried ſcene; and the hatred of the wicked has been proverbially called the *good man's ſhadow.* Some have been ready to think that the oppoſition was owing to the imprudence of the heralds of truth. But the apoſtles of the Lamb were wiſe as ſerpents and harmleſs as doves: and did not they meet with the moſt violent oppoſition? The two witneſſes are ſpoken of with high approbation by the Spirit of God, both as to the teſtimony they gave, and the manner of giving it (and he ſanctions not imprudence): but the enemies of the truth made war againſt them and ſlew them; and they that dwelt upon the earth rejoiced over them, and made merry, and ſent gifts one to another. But why ſuch inhumanity? The reaſon aſſigned ſhews the cauſe of the oppoſition to lie deeper than in the fault of the meſſenger, namely, in the nature of the truth

truth itſelf, and in the depraved diſpoſitions of ungodly men: 'becauſe theſe tormented them 'that dwelt on the earth.' Rev. ii. 10. Strange it may be thought that divine truth ſhould torment them! But we ſhall ceaſe to wonder when we conſider that 'men love darkneſs rather than 'light becauſe their deeds are evil. And every 'one that doth evil, hateth the light; neither 'cometh to the light, leſt his deeds ſhould be 'reproved.' Let every advocate of divine truth count the coſt, and ſeriouſly conſider, that if he would propagate it at home or abroad, he muſt expect to meet with oppoſition in a variety of forms.

5. Notwithſtanding this oppoſition, the friends of truth ſhould neither ſlacken nor ſuſpend their efforts in its behalf; but ſhould perſevere in the work with encreaſing ardour, and with lively hopes of ſucceſs. To diffuſe truth is God's deſign in the government of the world. His own glory muſt, according to the pureſt reaſon, as well as the higheſt authority, be his laſt end in all his works, in creation, in providence, and redemption. That He may receive the glory due, it is neceſſary He ſhould make known what He is, and what He has done. This is the province of truth, which is, you ſee, the means of divine inſtitution in order to the attainment of his grand end. The minds of men muſt receive the truth, their hearts muſt be filled with it,

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and faſhioned by it, that God in all things may be glorified through Jeſus Chriſt. Surely this is not matter of conjecture; but the evidence amounts to demonſtration. The divine plan is, like its Author, infinitely excellent; not complete, however, in a day, or a year, or a century; but extending itſelf through 6 or 7 thouſand years; all connected, part with part, and wheel with wheel, in a vaſt complicated machine, every minute portion and motion of which is neceſſary for the doing of the work. This, however, we know, as one of the grand laws by which it moves, is, 'that 'the natural is made for the moral world; and 'political changes in the ſtate of nations, with a 'view to the moral improvement of mankind.' To ſet this in a clearer light, and to impreſs it more ſtrongly on the heart, I ſhall produce an example which will ſerve at once for illuſtration and proof. To many of you the page of ancient profane hiſtory is familiar: you have followed Nebuchadnezzar, Cyrus, Alexander, and the Romans, in their rapid and extenſive conqueſts; and have ſeen with aſtoniſhment each diſpoſſeſſing his predeceſſors of their territory and glory. The ſpirit of the world admires the ſkilful plans, the perſevering courage, and the ſplendid ſucceſs of the heroes. A ſober reflecting mind enquires, why all this buſtle and confuſion on the face of the earth? Why all this 'overturning, overturn-'ing, overturning?' Ezek. xxi. 27. The volume

of inſpiration clears up the difficulty, and preſents objects in a wonderfully different view. Nebuchadnezzar and the others appear as ſo many pioneers toiling hard with the mattock and the ſhovel, levelling mountains, filling up valleys, making the rough places plain, and the crooked ſtraight. But why all this pains? Wait and ſee. Do you not perceive chariots and horſes advancing? They are the chariots of ſalvation: the Son of God rides in the firſt: his apoſtles are with Him: and there is a great company of preachers. You now perceive the cauſe. Jeſus and his miniſters are on their way to plant divine truth among the nations. It was fit that the road ſhould be made good for their ſpeedier progreſs, or in other words, that the world ſhould be prepared for their reception. And lo! theſe great ones of the earth were employed for ages to prepare the way of the Lord, and make his path ſtraight. Such has been the ſcope of God's operations in providence from the beginning, and eſpecially of his more remarkable acts. Such is his deſign now in the ſtrange and long continued commotions of the world; but we ſtand too near the object to perceive clearly the reaſon and manner of its producing the deſigned effect, as we do in the other, which is more remote, and placed in a favourable ſituation for the fulleſt view.

As this was the deſign of God in all his diſpenſations towards the nations of the world, ſo likewiſe

wiſe in all his dealings with the church. He placed his choſen people in the middle of the civilized part of the globe, ſo that it would be difficult to fix on a more proper center of communication than Judea was. In the conqueſts of David, and the extended dominion of Solomon over the neighbouring countries, the diffuſion of the truth was the object in view. Afterwards the captivities and diſperſions of the people of God were deſigned to promote the ſame glorious end: and the conduct of three young men who refuſed to worſhip Nebuchadnezzar's golden image, and various inſtances recorded in the New Teſtament of the influence of the Jews in bringing the heathens to the knowledge of the true God, prove that it was not in vain. The Chriſtian church diſplays the ſame plan on a more extended ſcale. In her numerous and cruel perſecutions, one deſign of Heaven was to arreſt the attention of a heedleſs world to their higheſt intereſts, and to ſhow them truth in a form ſo ſtriking, that it would be impoſſible to gaze on her without intereſt and feeling. In the baniſhment of the diſciples of Jeſus, and in their being compelled to flee from one city or country to another, the ſame deſign is apparent, namely to ſend forth his light and his truth; and the ſame effects are produced.

Conſider, likewiſe, for your encouragement, that divine truth has glorioufly prevailed over

falſehood and error, over ſuperſtition and idolatry in varied forms. It triumphed over the immenſe hoſt of pagan idols. It triumphed over all the ſects of the ancient philoſophers armed with all their popularity, pride, and ſubtilty. It has triumphed over the huge ſuperſtition of Rome, though defended by all the myriads of her prieſts. And is not truth as powerful now as it ever was? What then ſhould we fear!

Some are dreadfully afraid of infidelity. While men were Chriſtians in name, and infidels in practice, no fears were expreſſed: but when they call themſelves what they always were, many are petrified with terror. Be not alarmed: not one in fifty of thoſe who call themſelves deiſts, or atheiſts, underſtand the nature of that religion which they profeſs to reject. And are theſe creatures formidable antagoniſts who diſbelieve what they do not underſtand, becauſe they wiſh it not to be true? They are a diſhonour to any ſect. Beſides, the alarm has far exceeded reality. I will venture to affirm, without fear of contradiction, that from the birth of Chriſt to the preſent hour, there never was a country where one fifth part of the people were deiſts, or where one tenth part were atheiſts: nor a period of twelve years continuance, when the civil government was under the influence of either the one or the other; or when they perſecuted the truth. Superſtition has ſlaughtered more victims in a week, than deiſm

deiſm and atheiſm have ſince the hour that Chriſt expired upon the croſs. But even did infidelity prevail to the extent which the fears of many ſuggeſt, infidelity has neither eſtates nor honours at her diſpoſal; no body of men incorporated in its ſupport; no craftſmen who make ſilver ſhrines for Diana, and by that craft have their living; no kings to give to it their power (and compel men to be infidels), as they did to the beaſt, when for a long ſucceſſion of ages they compelled all men, both great and ſmall, to worſhip the beaſt. Be aſſured, that a falſe ſyſtem of religion which has not *theſe* on its ſide, is not formidable. Truth mocks at its moſt pointed weapons, as ſtraw and rotten wood. We have ſeen the birth of infidelity as a general thing, and affecting the multitude; and I have no doubt but, if we live long, we ſhall witneſs its death, and aſſiſt at its funeral. A delirium like that of a fever has ſeized a number of young, of ignorant, of heedleſs, of conceited, and of unprincipled people: but their infidelity will ſtand the aſſaults neither of truth, nor of diſtreſs: it has no arguments againſt truth, no conſolations againſt diſtreſs. In the predictive deſcription of the oppoſers of the Goſpel, the ſacred writers deign not even to name infidelity. Like a muſhroom ſpringing out of the dunghill of antichriſtian ſuperſtition, and a worldly ſanctuary, it is the excreſcence of a night. The light and heat of divine truth will

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ſoon utterly conſume it. Be of good courage then, ye friends of God: every foe of truth ſhall be vanquiſhed: all oppoſition ſhall be overcome.

6. May it not be certainly inferred, that the objections brought againſt the diffuſion of truth in the world are utterly deſtitute of weight. That the enemies of truth ſhould oppoſe its progreſs is not to be wondered at; but that any of its friends ſhould diſcover a ſimilar diſpoſition, and ſhould do little elſe but raiſe objections againſt the methods which are employed, and ſhould be more forward in finding fault with the attempts of their brethren, than in aiding them with their counſel, and ſupporting them by their influence, is bitterly to be deplored. But let the objections be weighed in the balance of the ſanctuary. 'It 'is a mere enthuſiaſtic heat,' ſay ſome. But is not divine truth in its nature calculated to make men wiſe, and good, and happy? On account of human depravity, there is need of ſuperior power to give it efficacy. That power is alſo provided: it is the office and prerogative of the Holy Spirit to render the truth effectual for theſe important purpoſes. And is not the propagation of the truth a perfectly reaſonable ſervice? 'Thoſe to 'whom you wiſh to convey divine truth will not 'receive it,' others ſay, 'They are rude and 'barbarous: their minds are uncultivated, they 'cannot comprehend it.' Take heed that you ſpeak not diſreſpectfully of God. Man is his creature:

creature: and divine truth is a revelation from God: he made it for the uſe of man. To ſay that man, whoſe ſoul God framed for the reception of this truth, cannot comprehend it, is not an expreſſion which tends to the honour of God. That the cultivated mind will more eaſily underſtand it, is to the honour of the truth, and will be readily granted. But that any of the human race are ſo degraded as to be incapable of perceiving the truth is contrary to fact, and diſhonourable to the Creator. Man can civilize the rudeſt nations; and cannot God teach more plainly than man? 'But the world is under 'the power of inveterate prejudices.' Was it not always ſo?' But has not truth influenced millions to lay their prejudices aſide, and to embrace the religion of Jeſus? And is it not ſtill the ſame? Has it not as much excellence and energy now as it ever had? 'Falſe ſyſtems 'of religion, have continued to rule for ages: 'and how can you think they will be overcome 'by your puny efforts?' Let us examine the matter. If no attempts have been made to propagate the truth in theſe countries, the reaſon of the prevalence of error is ſeen at once. If perſevering attempts have been made without ſucceſs, it will be found to be owing to ſome other cauſe than the innate ſtrength of error. You have read in the book of the Revelation, and probably with much ſurpriſe, that the whole world

world wondered after the beaſt: and they wor-ſhipped the beaſt, ſaying, Who is like unto the beaſt, ch. xiii. Blind and ſtupid creatures! you will ſay: but were there none to drive the folly out of their hearts? Yes, there were. Why then did they not ſucceed? You read in the ſame chapter that the dragon gave his power to the beaſt. In another part of the book, ch. xvii. the figurative veil is ſtripped off, and in place of the dragon we are preſented with a view of 'ten 'kings who had all one mind, and gave their power 'and ſtrength unto the beaſt,' and unſheathed their ſwords to compel all to worſhip the beaſt, and to put to death thoſe who refuſed to comply with their impious will. Here the myſtery is explained: and we are taught that the oppoſition made to truth by antichriſtian ſuperſtition, was formidable not from its own craft or might, but becauſe the weighty arms of the ten kings were lifted up in its defence; and that its continuance was owing ſolely to the ſword of the civil power, which ſhed the blood of ſaints, and of the wit-neſſes of Jeſus, when they were delivering their teſtimony againſt it. Without this ſupport, long ago had the whole ſyſtem been buried in the duſt: and this ſupport and its effects form the moſt prominent feature in the hideous viſage of Antichriſt. 'But I cannot ſee that your attempts 'will be productive of any good.' I never hear this objection but with aſtoniſhment. Were any man

man to ſay, You will do no good to the hungry by giving him food, nor to the thirſty by giving him drink, nor to the ſick by adminiſtering medicine, nor to the poor by an alms, nor to the debtor by advancing money to diſcharge his debt; every body would look on him as a fool, and ſuſpect that his intellectual faculties were remarkably deranged. But is not divine truth the bread of the hungry ſoul? Is it not the water of life to quench its thirſt? Is it not a medicine of God's appointing to heal all its diſeaſes? Is not divine truth a treaſure to baniſh the poverty of the ſoul? Does it not provide a ſurety to diſcharge its load of debt?—'But my firm 'opinion is, that the time is not yet come.' When a man is hungry, is not that the time to give him food? When he is thirſty, is not that the time to give him drink? When he is naked, is not that the time to clothe him? When he is ſick, is not that the time for the phyſician to apply medicinal aid? And when men are ignorant, wicked, and perſiſting in ſin, is not that the time to ſend divine truth in order to make them wiſe unto ſalvation? Let not conjectures concerning the decrees of God be heard of as a rule of conduct: there are repeated commands enjoining what is duty; and directions pointing out the path in which we ought to walk.—'But 'many have tried in vain to diffuſe divine truth, 'and all the fruit which ſome have found was

'injury and deſtruction to themſelves.' Facts are in direct oppoſition to this objection. Can you produce an inſtance of any good man, who, under the ſanctifying influences of the Spirit of God, with a fervent zeal to promote truth, ever laboured altogether in vain? It is not in your power to adduce an example of an able teacher of divine truth, who in the moſt unfavourable ſituation, whether at home or abroad, ever perſevered in the work for ſeven years without effect? That the heralds of the truth have been cruelly treated from age to age, none will deny: but that their labours have been attended with no beneficial efficacy, who can have the face to aſſert? Though the prophets were perſecuted, was their teſtimony of no avail? Though the apoſtles received every kind of injury from the world, and were ſometimes bound with chains, yet the word of God was not bound, but had free courſe and was glorified. Though the two witneſſes of Jeſus, when they had finiſhed their teſtimony, were ſlain, and their dead bodies lay in the ſtreets of the great city, their teſtimony was not ſlain: it lived and communicated life to precious ſouls. Jeſus himſelf was put to death becauſe he bore witneſs to the truth; but the truth did not die: nay, by his death the moſt glorious truth in the whole ſyſtem received its exiſtence, and giveth life unto the world.

But

But it would occupy too much of your time to adduce more objections. To answer the is eaſy. For, indeed, what objections can be brought againſt the propagation of truth now, which would not have been applicable to every preceding age, or which will not be applicable to every age that is to come? Were they to influence men's conduct, as a natural conſequence, truth would never be diffuſed; and the world would be left in darkneſs and miſery.

Conſider then, my brethren, your work. Is it not an honour for men to be ſo employed? You have heard, and, I truſt, weighed in your minds, every thing which has been ſaid to produce your active exertions in the cauſe, and the objections which are alledged againſt it. What is your determination? But need I aſk? Does not one heart animate you? Is it not your united voice, 'Whatever others may do, we will exert our-'ſelves to diffuſe divine truth.' May Jehovah by his grace confirm, ſtrengthen, and continue this noble purpoſe, till death remove you from the benevolent ſervice. Go on with redoubled ardour. After what you have already heard, may I not ſay, let nothing diſcourage you. Open your eyes, and behold with joy who are on your ſide. Yours is the cauſe of God; that cauſe for which the world was created, and for the promoting of which the world is upheld and pre-

ſerved. 'Fear ye not, for God is with you; be 'not diſmayed, for He is your God: He will help 'you, He will uphold you, He will ſtrengthen you 'with the right hand of his righteouſneſs.' Jeſus your maſter is with you; and He has promiſed his preſence to the end of time, to his ſervants engaged in his work. The Holy Spirit, whoſe office it is to take of the things of Chriſt and ſhew them unto men, is your helper, your counſellor, and your guide. Angels rejoice in your efforts, account you their peculiar charge, and miniſter unto you. Ten thouſands of ſaints are daily imploring the divine bleſſing upon you; and millions of prayers of faith, which for hundreds of years have been entering Heaven, are ſtill in a great meaſure unanſwered; but anſwered they ſhall be, and the benefit of them is reſerved for you. Be zealous then, ye friends of truth, and ſpread abroad, far and wide over the face of the earth. Though at firſt it be like a 'handful of corn on the top of the mountains, the 'fruit thereof ſhall ſhake like Lebanon: and they 'of the city ſhall flouriſh like the graſs of the earth.'

Having, I truſt, eſtabliſhed the general principle, namely, the unſpeakable importance of divine truth, and produced in your minds a conviction that you ought to be zealous in diffuſing it, permit me to direct the force of the arguments and motives in ſupport of the particular way

way of diffuſing it, which the Society has in view ‘ by the diſtribution of Religious Tracts.’

It is, you ſee, a method of God's own appointment; and which he has commanded to be employed: for every injunction to diſſeminate truth by writing and reading, is applicable to the object before us.

It is a method which God has remarkably bleſſed. The moſt extenſive uſefulneſs of ſome of the moſt eminent preachers has been by their printed tracts. Can any of the ſons of men be compared as to ſucceſs in their miniſtry to the apoſtle Paul? How many thouſands were converted by his diſcourſes! But a hundred times more have been converted by reading his written and printed letters to the churches and to individuals? Luther and Calvin promoted the reformation more extenſively by their books, than by their preaching. Mr. Boſton and Dr. Doddridge, both eminently ſerious and affectionate preachers, have been the inſtruments of ſaving a greater number of precious ſouls, the former by his *Fourfold State of Man*, the latter by *The Riſe and Progreſs of Religion in the Soul*, than by all the ſermons they ever delivered. With hundreds more this has been the caſe. Nor imagine, brethren, though our exiſtence as a ſociety be not of a year's duration, that we have laboured in vain. We alſo can exult (to God be all the glory) in various inſtances

inſtances of ſucceſs *: and if it be conſidered that in this mode of diffuſing truth, the known ſucceſs bears hardly any proportion to what will remain unknown, till it be diſcloſed in the eternal world, we have reaſon to conclude that God has honoured us with an abundant bleſſing; and may the more confidently call on you for aid and co-operation. Nor ſhall we call in vain. Conſider that the portion of happineſs which, with reſpect to degree and duration, is communicated to one ſoul that is begotten again by the word of truth, exceeds all the pleaſure that ever has been, or ever will be enjoyed by all the men on the face of the earth. From the effect of this conſideration the Society expects much of pious and benevolent minds.

* By accounts received from perſons in Middleſex, Kent, Norfolk, Worceſterſhire, and Devonſhire, who have diſtributed Tracts, we have reaſon to believe that many have been influenced by them (eſpecially by the Perſuaſive to Public Worſhip), to attend at the houſe of God who did not attend before. In ſome inſtances the perſons brought to attend have diſcovered very ſerious impreſſions of religion. A few appear to have undergone that change concerning which our Lord ſpeaks in John iii. 3. The moſt remarkable intelligence is from a gentleman in Devonſhire who diſtributed ſome of the Tracts among his ſervants, particularly No. 4, Watts on the End of Time, and No. 12, Hints to a Servant, and had the pleaſure to obſerve four of them much impreſſed by divine truth. Two or three of them, he has reaſon to think, are become true Chriſtians.

You cannot ſay that it is a difficult method of doing good which we recommend. To ſpeak in favour of the truth is not ſo eaſy. When deſired to do it, 'I have an invincible diffidence,' ſays one, 'and cannot ſpeak to people as I ought.' Another pleads, 'If the perſon were alone, or not under the influence of paſſion, I would endeavour to convince him of his error.' You can in all theſe caſes give a Religious Tract, which he may read at leiſure in his calmeſt hours with a bleſſing.

It is a way of doing good adapted to the different ſituations of men. Do you meet a young perſon: you can give him the advice 'To a Youth.' Are you called to viſit one in affliction: you can put into his hand the addreſs 'To the afflicted.' Have you reaſon to think that a man profanes the Sabbath, and abſents himſelf from the houſe of God: you have it in your power to recommend to his peruſal the tract on the obſervance 'of the Lord's Day,' and the 'Perſuaſive to 'Public Worſhip.' A word thus directed to each in ſeaſon, how good it may be!

Good may be done here at a ſmall expence. The Tracts are ſold at the loweſt rate: and the perſon who can ſpare but a ſmall ſum in the courſe of the year, may procure ſuch a valuable treaſure of divine truth, as will prove beneficial to many.

It will be juſtly conſidered as a recommendation by not a few, that it is not the undertaking of a party; nor deſigned to condemn or applaud any particular ſect. The Society has on the liſt both of writers of Tracts, and ſubſcribers to its funds, men of every denomination of believers in the country. There is nothing in its Tracts to recommend or to ſatirize epiſcopacy, preſbytery, independency, methodiſm, pædo-baptiſm, or anti-pædo-baptiſm. Nor is it the deſign to take a part in the nice diſtinctions, or peculiar notions, or diſcriminating opinions of high-flying individuals, or puny ſects. The object is to hold forth to view thoſe grand doctrinal and practical truths which have in every age been mighty through God, in converting, ſanctifying, and comforting ſouls: and by the influence of which men have been enabled, while they lived, to live to the Lord, and when they died, to die in the Lord.

To this inſtitution we ſolicit, brethren, your benevolent aid. Imagine not, however, that we wiſh to raiſe the Religious Tract Society on the ruin of other inſtitutions. The ſpirit of the houſe of Othman, where the eldeſt ſon, when advanced to the throne, was wont to ſacrifice all his brothers to his ambition, and his fears, we abhor. With pleaſure we contemplate that variety of taſte in the mode of doing good which benevolent minds poſſeſs: and while we ſee each following

lowing with ardour his favourite object, we rejoice in the wiſdom of Him who is the author of every good and perfect gift, and who thus encreaſes the ſum of human felicity. To every benevolent attempt for promoting the temporal happineſs of man, we cordially wiſh ſucceſs: and it is a diſtinguiſhing honour of the capital of the Britiſh empire, that it contains a greater number of charitable inſtitutions for alleviating and removing the evils incident to humanity, than any city in the world from the foundation of the earth till the preſent time could ever boaſt of, or even now can. May God give his bleſſing to them all! But as the diſciples of Jeſus, we moſt highly value thoſe inſtitutions which have for their object the happineſs of immortal ſouls. Every thing of this nature we moſt earneſtly beſeech Thee, our Father in Heaven, to crown with thy peculiar bleſſing! You ſeek to promote the cauſe of Chriſt in the religious community to which you belong; to make the Goſpel more fully known throughout every part of your native country; and to ſtrengthen the hands of Miſſionary Societies for propagating Chriſtianity among the heathen. Ye do well: and may the Lord God eſtabliſh the work of your hands upon you. Continue with encreaſing zeal all theſe labours of love.

But when a benevolent man has relieved a few perſons in diſtreſs, if others in a ſituation equally afflicting apply, and it be in the power of his hands to help them, will he withhold his aid? It

is impoſſible, you ſay: and we believe it. Is it then unreaſonable, if we beg your patronage to this ſociety? Adopt it into the number of pious and benevolent inſtitutions which you regard as your children: and let it from time to time partake of your parental and foſtering care. On you our chief dependence is placed. Do you ſay, rather look to thoſe who are not concerned in any other benevolent inſtitution? Alas, brethren, if there be here a perſon who does not contribute to the advancement of religion beyond what neceſſity compels him, I ſhould as ſoon expect a ſtone out of the wall, or a beam out of the timbers of the houſe to encreaſe the collection, as ſuch an individual. He will be ſeen paſſing by without leaving an offering at the ſhrine of truth. It is from the benevolent, and thoſe who are accuſtomed to give, that we expect ſupport.

The Society needs your aſſiſtance now in a collection, and hopes to receive it for the diffuſion of truth. Let none ſay, 'What I can ſpare 'is not worth your acceptance.' Remember the honourable mention made by the Lord Jeſus of the widow's mite, which ſhe caſt into the ſacred treaſury.

Many of you, we hope, feel an inclination to become annual ſubſcribers to the Society; and all of you, we are perſuaded, will be diſpoſed to provide yourſelves with a quantity of Religious Tracts, according to your ſeveral abilities, that you

you may ſpread divine truth all around you. How uſeful will it be to put them into the hands of all that are in your houſe. There is reaſon to believe they have been beneficial in this way; and that by the peruſal of them ſervants in ſeveral families have been made wiſe unto ſalvation. How uſeful will it be to diſperſe them in your neighbourhood! Divine truth will make it more ſafe, more quiet, and more pleaſant. How uſeful, when you travel, to take with you a packet of divine truth, and diffuſe the light in every village and town through which you paſs. How ſuitable the reflection to a diſciple of Jeſus, 'I 'endeavour to render every place I viſit the better 'for my journey, and to leave behind me not a 'curſe, but a bleſſing.' Thoſe who would wiſh to diſperſe tracts in this way, but cannot in perſon, will find others to do it for them, and to be the almoners of their charity to ſouls. To conclude, ſeek, my brethren, conſtantly to feel the power of divine truth upon your own ſouls: and as no diſciple of Jeſus lives to himſelf, endeavour in every way that your calling permits and requires, to diffuſe divine truth in the world, and abound therein more and more: and when you enter the eternal world, where thoſe that are wiſe ſhall ſhine as the brightneſs of the firmament, may you be found among thoſe who have turned many to righteouſneſs, and ſhall ſhine as the ſtars for ever and ever. Amen.

FINIS.

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